

## Opinion Article

# Opportunities in Ethnomedicine

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Phytomedicine can be defined as herbal medicine with therapeutic and healing properties. Traditional medicine has a long history; fossil records reveal that our ancestors used plants as medicines at least 60,000 years ago. It's a traditional herbal medicine system which has been acquired through trial and error over centuries. It has been acquired from nature, studying wild animal behaviour or through lucky events. In the case of Ayurveda and Siddha, it combines age old wisdom of learned sages with well-defined axioms. They normally have no adverse side effects and promote a long-lasting curative impact. The downside is the long duration of treatment; however, this is cost effective.

There has been a global resurgence in traditional and healthcare systems. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines the term Traditional medicine as: "The sum total of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness." WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2014–2023 emphasizes the need to integrate traditional and complementary medicine to promote universal healthcare and to ensure the quality, safety and effectiveness of such medicine. The world is looking for cost effective, easily available, better physiologically compatible traditional systems of medicine and holistic approach to provide basic healthcare to all.

From old plants come new medicines. The ancient Egyptians used myrtle leaves to treat aches and pains. Hippocrates, widely accepted as the father of medicine, used an extract of willow bark in the fourth century BC to treat fever. The active ingredient in both these remedies was found to be salicylic acid (aspirin). Aspirin is still widely used today. Tu Youyou announced the discovery of a substance, artemisinin, found in a Traditional Chinese medicinal herb – wormwood (*Artemisia annua*), which inhibits the malaria parasite. This discovery saved millions of lives and earned her the Nobel prize for medicine in 2015. "Jeevani" is a restorative, immunoenhancing, anti-stress and anti-fatigue agent, based on the herbal medicinal plant arogyapaacha, used by the Kani tribals in their traditional medicine.

There are about 250 – 400 thousand plant species and only about 15% has been scientifically investigated. Thus, there is a scope to get new pharmaceutical compounds, drugs which may overcome fatal disease and also provide cheaper medicines for human welfare. AYUSH – needs to play a strong future role. In Africa nearly 80% of population uses such medicine for their primary healthcare. In China, it was estimated that traditional herbal medicine account for 30–50% of the total medicinal consumption. In Australia about 48 %, in Canada 70 %, in Germany 80%, in USA 42 %, in Belgium 39 % and in France 76 % of population uses traditional/complementary medicine at least once. In Malaysia, people spent more on traditional medicine than allopathic drugs.

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Importance of herbal medicines in terms of healthcare provider and economy are growing steadily. Therefore, India has a great opportunity to promote ISM globally. Germany, the originator of Homoeopathy, has considerable interest in traditional systems of medicine and an India-German cooperation in traditional systems of medicine will give a big boost to Ayurvedic system of medicine.

In the fight against COVID-19, Ayush system of medicine played an important role in increasing the immunity of people. Addressing the inaugural session of '4th Global Ayurveda Festival (GAF) Virtual Conference & Expo' (12-19 March, 2021), organized by FICCI, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted that the world has realized the importance of Ayurveda and traditional medicines during Covid-19. The current situation presents the right time for Ayurveda and traditional

medicines to become even more popular globally. Career Opportunities on studying ethnomedicine, phytochemistry and allied fields include the Biopharmaceutical Industry, Healthcare/Cosmetics industry, Nutraceuticals /Food industry, Quality Control/Quality Assurance, Herb Cultivation Industry, Entrepreneur and researcher. Other avenues which may open up are Production and processing specialist, Wellness industry, ISM (Indian systems of Medicine) Pharma industry, sacred grove management, TKDL - Traditional Knowledge Digital Library and Plant based veterinary medicines.

You get the Science  
You get the herbal background  
Get a mission to drive innovation  
To make something that was ancient – modern again.